

Fall 11-20-2016

What Effect Does Full Day Kindergarten Have On Student Achievement In Literacy?

Philip Lee Munkvold

Hamline University, pmunkvold01@hamline.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.hamline.edu/hse_all



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Munkvold, Philip Lee, "What Effect Does Full Day Kindergarten Have On Student Achievement In Literacy?" (2016). *School of Education Student Capstone Theses and Dissertations*. 4221.
https://digitalcommons.hamline.edu/hse_all/4221

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Education at DigitalCommons@Hamline. It has been accepted for inclusion in School of Education Student Capstone Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Hamline. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@hamline.edu, lterveer01@hamline.edu.

WHAT EFFECT DOES FULL DAY KINDERGARTEN HAVE ON STUDENT
ACHIEVEMENT IN LITERACY?

by

Philip L. Munkvold

A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements of the degree of Master of Arts in Literacy Education

Hamline University

St. Paul, Minnesota

December 2016

Primary Advisor: Jennifer Carlson
Secondary Advisor: Julia Hennen
Peer Reviewer: Laura Taggart

To all of my students from the past, in the present, and in the future:
Thank you for being in my life, and for allowing me to be a part of yours. You are my
greatest teachers!

To Jennifer, Julia, and Laura:
Thank you for being a part of this journey with me. Your guidance, support, and
encouragement mean the world to me!

To my family, friends, and colleagues
Without you, I would not be where I am today. I am eternally grateful.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction.....	1
Background	1
Persona Rationale	2
Professional Rationale	4
Context.....	5
Conclusion	6
CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review	8
Introduction	8
The Evolution of Kindergarten	10
Kindergarten Today	12
Essential Literacy Skills for Kindergarten Success	12
Literacy Instruction in Today's Kindergarten	14
Read Aloud	14
Shared Reading	14
Guided Reading	15
Independent Reading	16
Word Study	16
Writing.....	17
Assessing Student Learning.....	17
Early Reading Assessments	18
A Change in Report Cards	19

Examining Half-Day Kindergarten	20
Half-Day Kindergarten Background	20
Advantages of Half-Day Kindergarten	20
Disadvantages of Half-day Kindergarten	20
Examining Full-Day Kindergarten.....	21
Factors Influencing Full-Day Kindergarten	21
High Quality Kindergarten Programs	22
Are Children Ready for the Rigor of Full-Day Kindergarten?	23
Advantages of Full-Day Kindergarten	24
Parent and Teacher Perceptions of Full-Day Kindergarten	24
Parents	24
Teachers	26
Conclusion	26
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS.....	29
Introduction	29
Setting	30
Human Subjects Committee	32
Methods	32
Participants	35
Teacher #1.....	35
Teacher #2	35
Teacher #3	35
Teacher #4	36

Conclusion	36
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS	38
Introduction	38
Survey Results	39
Current Kindergarten Teachers: Likert Scale Questionnaire	39
Current Kindergarten Teachers: Open Responses	42
First and Second Grade Teachers: Likert Questionnaire	44
First and Second Grade Teachers: Open Responses	47
Interview Results	48
Teacher #1	48
Teacher #2	49
Teacher #3	49
Teacher #4	50
Kindergarten Assessment Data	51
First Grade Assessment Data	53
Second Grade Assessment Data	54
Conclusion	55
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION	57
Introduction	57
Revisiting the Literature	58
Limitations	59
Implications of Current Research and Ideas for Future Research	60
Using and Communicating the Results.....	61

Putting It All Together	61
APPENDICES.....	63
Appendix A: Kindergarten Teacher Survey.....	63
Appendix B: First and Second Grade Teacher Survey	67
Appendix C: Teacher/Administrator Letter of Consent	71
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	75

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Years Teaching Elementary School.....	39
Table 2: Preparing Students to Read.....	40
Table 3: Literacy Assessments	40
Table 4: Developmental Appropriateness.....	41
Table 5: Instructional Changes.....	42
Table 6: Years Teaching Elementary School.....	44
Table 7: Achievement Gap.....	44
Table 8: Instructional Changes	45
Table 9: Literacy Assessments	46
Table 10: Preparing Students to Read.....	46
Table 11: 2013-2014 Kindergarten Assessment Data.....	51
Table 12: 2014-2015 Kindergarten Assessment Data	52
Table 13: 2015-2016 Kindergarten Assessment Data	52
Table 14: First Grade Curriculum Based Measure Data	53
Table 15: First Grade Nonsense Word Fluency Data.....	53
Table 16: 2015-2016 Second Grade Curriculum Based Measure Data	54

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Background

When students walk into their classrooms on the first day of kindergarten, many are just starting their lifelong journey of learning. Over the years, kindergarten has gone through some significant changes. Not only have the expectations placed on students become extremely high, but students are also required to sit attentively for longer periods of time with less time for play and socializing. When students start kindergarten, many do not have the necessary social skills to successfully interact with their peers or teachers, let alone have mastered any letter names or sounds of the alphabet. With these high demands placed on students, it is no wonder why there is an increased pressure for full-day kindergarten.

In the past, districts across Minnesota had the choice of full-day or half-day kindergarten. Many full-day kindergarten programs required tuition while half-day programs were free. Beginning in the 2014-2015 school year, Minnesota offered full-day kindergarten programs to all students free of charge. Minnesota's transition to free

full-day kindergarten is the catalyst for my research question: *What effect does full-day kindergarten have on student achievement in literacy?* In this chapter, I will discuss the my personal and professional rationale for this question including my experiences as a full-day kindergarten teacher.

Personal Rationale

Thinking back to my time in kindergarten, there is very little I can remember other than play centers, naptime, and learning the letters of the alphabet. After an interesting conversation with my recently retired kindergarten teacher, I uncovered some of the differences between my time in half-day kindergarten and the current full-day kindergarten program I teach. Throughout this conversation, I learned that the few hours each day I was in school was dedicated to developing to appropriate social skills necessary to be successful students. Yes, we did learn the foundational skills in the areas of reading and math such as letter names, letter and sound correspondences, sorting, and counting, but we also learned to positively interact with peers, to solve problems, and to make sense of the world around us. In my experience as a kindergarten teacher, I have noticed a vastly different kindergarten than the one I remember and the one described to me by my kindergarten teacher. In my classroom, the academic expectations are much higher.

Students are expected to enter kindergarten with a strong letter name and sound knowledge in order to reach the end of the year goal of reading at a level D. Additionally,

students are expected to write using punctuation, learn and retain 92 sight words, and read, write, and represent numbers up to 100. Understanding how vastly different my kindergarten experience was compared to kindergarten often makes me wonder what would have happened if I attended a full-day program that matched the rigor of today's kindergarten. Would I be a better reader than I am today? Would I have landed a spot in the advanced math or reading classes in high school? Or would I have ended up in the same place I am now?

Each day in my classroom, students are engaged in a variety of tasks during literacy block. Fifteen minutes is spent on phonemic awareness, twenty minutes is spent on phonics, twenty minutes is spent teaching literacy as a whole group including shared reading, read alouds, and comprehension strategies. Students are also engaged in whole group writing for twenty-five minutes, and seventy-five minutes is spent doing guided reading. During teacher-led guided reading, students are working independently on reading, writing, technology, and working with words. When all of the minutes are added up, the result is 155 minutes, or just shy of three hours devoted entirely to literacy. The typical half-day program in my district is three hours. In these three hours, students have a thirty-minute specialist, and must spend a significant amount of time on math instruction. Teachers who have mix of half-day and full-day students have the difficult job of balancing their time to order to meet the needs of these students and ensure they are held to the same standards as full-day kindergarten students.

Thinking beyond the walls of a kindergarten classroom, how does this discrepancy affect students as they enter higher grade levels? Are these teachers noticing differences, too?

Professional Rationale

I have been interested in this topic since the beginning of my first year of teaching. I was in a unique position as my first year of teaching was the same year that full-day kindergarten was free for all students. This switch resulted in some restructuring of the district's facilities with the creation of two kindergarten centers. One kindergarten center houses the kindergarten sections of four of the district's elementary schools, and the other kindergarten center houses the kindergarten sections of two elementary schools. Prior to the 2014-2015 school year, full-day kindergarten was available to families who had the means to do so. The result was a near 50/50 split. Half of the kindergarteners were enrolled in full-day kindergarten and half were enrolled in half-day kindergarten.

Although full-day kindergarten is now free, families still have the option of half-day kindergarten. When I heard this information, I attempted to piece together how I could teach all the same standards to a student who was only at school for half the amount of time. Although I did not end up having a half-day student, there were several of my colleagues who did and they struggled to meet the needs of all students.

Although there are students who have experience with a school-type structure similar to preschool, there are many students who have never stepped foot into a

classroom. As a kindergarten teacher who has only taught full day, it is difficult to imagine teaching half-day. My literacy block alone is longer than most half-day programs. Not to mention the other standards and content areas we must teach.

Context

When we were working with our grade-level Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), one task was to create a full-day schedule that accommodated any potential half-day students. These half-day students were expected to perform at the same level as their full-day counterparts. In the end, I did not have any half-day students which gave me the flexibility to adjust my schedule to best meet the needs of my class. This, however, was not the case for many of the teachers in my building.

I have learned through various conversations with staff in my building how they were able to accommodate for these students, and if this had any impact on the rest of the class. One teacher described the difficulties of building and maintaining a consistent routine because she felt pressured to make sure that her half-day student was still exposed to all grade-level standards. This meant, for example, that certain days of the week she would do phonics exercises in the morning, and the other days during the week she would have to do phonemic awareness practice. This teacher would frequently rearrange her schedule to accommodate the half-day students, which could have an impact on other opportunities like play centers or choice time, which is equally important for kindergarten students. After learning about the difficulties of accommodating for half-day students

within a full-day classroom, I started to wonder why parents were still choosing half-day kindergarten for their children when full-day kindergarten was now free to all students.

Whether or not parents are aware of the changes kindergarten has undergone in the last several years, they play a crucial role in a child's education and ultimately make the decisions they feel are best for their child; however, this is not an easy decision, especially as today's kindergarten is becoming much more like first grade. When meeting with families at the beginning of the year, many are unaware of the stark differences between their kindergarten experiences and the expectation of kindergarten students today. What about the students who have not attended any type of formal schooling? Are we setting these students up for success by placing them into a rigorous, full-day kindergarten program?

Conclusion

I began teaching kindergarten the first year that Minnesota offered full-day kindergarten at no charge to families; however, families still had the choice to enroll their children in a half-day kindergarten program. I encourage all of my families to enroll in the full-day program for multiple reasons: In my district, there are no exclusive half-day kindergarten classrooms, which means they would have to leave school while the rest of their friends stay. Furthermore, the learning expectations are increasingly difficult leaving very little time for students to meet all the standards without a full day. I am an advocate for full-day kindergarten programs, but I need to ensure that I am meeting students'

social, emotional, and developmental needs. These thoughts, once again, lead me to my question: *What effect does full-day kindergarten have on student achievement in literacy?*

In chapter two of this capstone, I will describe what research has to say about the benefits of full-day kindergarten, the benefits of half-day kindergarten, perceptions of teachers in regards to kindergarten, and factors that influence a family's decision when enrolling their child in kindergarten. Chapter three will cover the methods of research for this capstone. Chapter four will focus on the results of the study, and chapter five will be the summary of the capstone and opportunities for reflection and future research.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

As stated in Chapter One, kindergarten has undergone significant changes in the last several years. As of the 2014-2015 school year, full-day kindergarten is now free for all students in Minnesota. Before then, many schools offered free full-day kindergarten, but some districts offered the full-day program for a fee, leaving many families with no choice but to enroll their students in half-day programs. Because of this, most kindergarten students, regardless of socioeconomic status, will receive nearly twice the number of hours in kindergarten than in years past. This has helped formulate the research question: *What effect does full-day kindergarten have on student achievement in literacy?* In some school districts, families have the option to enroll their students in either full-day or half-day kindergarten. While it is great that parents still have a choice, the circumstances are not ideal. In my district, there are no classrooms exclusively teaching half-day students. Instead, these few students are likely the only half-day students within their classrooms. Having a combination of half-day and full-day students in one classroom not only creates pressure for the teachers to ensure all students master

grade-level standards, but half-day students are getting half of the education as their full-day counterparts.

This literature review will examine what research concludes about the changes kindergarten has faced over the years, the advantages and disadvantages of half-day kindergarten programs, the advantages and disadvantages of full-day kindergarten programs, the reasons parents choose certain kindergarten programs for their children, and the perceptions of teachers in regards to the different kindergarten programs.

The first section will discuss changes in kindergarten by first uncovering what kindergarten looked like in previous generations including the catalysts of change in the kindergarten curriculum. From here, today's kindergarten will be addressed. Within this section, the literacy skills and instructional practices in kindergarten, as well as highlight major components of the kindergarten literacy framework will be examined. Lastly, assessment in the kindergarten classroom will be discussed.

The next section will look exclusively at half-day kindergarten. The first part of this section will be spent looking at data to determine the numbers of half-day kindergarten students in the United States. Next, the advantages and disadvantages of both half-day kindergarten and full-day kindergarten will be addressed, as well as the effect each program has on student achievement.

The final sections will be dedicated to understanding the perspective of the parents and teachers regarding kindergarten. This section will begin by discussing what parents look for in a kindergarten program. Next, there will be an explanation of why

parents choose half-day programs for their children will. Finally, the chapter will conclude by considering why parents choose full-day kindergarten for their children.

The Evolution of Kindergarten

The idea of kindergarten originated in 1837 when Friedrich Froebel created “a child’s garden” for young children in order to foster their mental, social, and emotional needs through movement, play, and interactive and creative activities. In 1857, Margarethe Schurz opened the first Froebelian program in Wisconsin. This was a full-day, German-speaking program, which prompted the first English-speaking public kindergarten program in St. Louis in 1873. Between 1890 and 1910, interest in kindergarten grew significantly (Lee et al., 2006, p. 164). Since then, kindergarten has been undergoing constant change.

In an article written by Elizabeth Graue (2011), “As kindergarten was incorporated into elementary school, programming slowly moved from half to full day in many areas and became governed by a desire for more academic content” (p. 14). She continued by explaining the two catalysts for this shift. First, the numbers of children in child care programs increased as the number of women in the workforce increased. The result of this was that, “...Kindergarten’s traditional role of socializing children into group experiences seemed less relevant” (p. 14). Secondly, early intervention began to interest the public and school policy makers. These policymakers were realizing that that

middle-class children were exposed to millions more words than children living in poverty. In order to respond to this gap, preschool programs were funded.

While preschool programs were being funded, the structure of elementary schools was changing, too. Graue suggested that states and school districts began to develop grade level standards organized by content area. She states, “A key element in this process was research that stated that if students did not read at grade level by grade 3, they would never catch up” (p. 14). With this in mind, the districts would map the trajectories needed for students to meet these standards, as well as develop interventions to aid the struggling students. For the first time, kindergarten was included on this map. Graue states that kindergarten underwent a dramatic shift as content standards were created in kindergarten. Furthermore, the advent of pacing guides and high-pressure progress monitoring in literacy and math, attention to other elements of the kindergarten curriculum only exacerbated this shift.

In another study, Curwood (2007), states that, “It used to be normal for first graders to still be learning to read. Now, the handful of kindergarteners who aren’t reading by the end of the year are considered behind” (p. 30). She also says that just ten years ago, only fifteen percent of kindergarten students were reading. Thirty years ago, only five percent were reading. According to the same author, the reason why kindergarten is becoming more academic based is because there is a better understanding of the importance of early learning and the ability of children.

Kindergarten Today

The previous section focused on changes that kindergarten has undergone in the last several decades, including the catalysts of those changes. The relevance of group learning experiences for young children declining, the funding of preschool programs, and the creation of content standards for kindergarten has changed the way students learn in kindergarten. This section will discuss today's kindergarten by highlighting kindergarten readiness, literacy instruction in today's kindergarten, assessing student learning, and how kindergarten report cards have changed.

Essential Literacy Skills for Kindergarten Success

In order for students to be successful in full day kindergarten, there are foundational skills that must be mastered before the start. Callaghan and Madelaine's (2012) research on the implications for preschool early literacy instruction suggests that phonological awareness is one of the most important factors indicating early reading success and school readiness. The authors define phonological awareness as, "A broad level of metalinguistic awareness and refers to the sensitivity to any size unit of sound within the speech stream" (p. 14). Examples of phonological awareness included rhyming activities, counting syllables, segmenting and blending onset and rime. Phonological awareness includes larger units of sound, such as onset and rime (e.g. /bl/ and /end/

combine to make the word ‘blend’), as well as the smallest unit of sound (e.g. the sounds /p/ /a/ /n/ make the word ‘pan’).

While it is true that students need to learn phonological skills in order to become successful readers, “Students also need instruction on oral language and listening comprehension skills” (p. 15). Callaghan and Madelaine’s research suggested that phonemic awareness skills taught to young children had a large impact on conventional literacy skills such as reading and spelling, but only a small impact on oral language skills. A language-rich environment helps students acquire vocabulary during their preschool years. In order to better understand complex vocabulary in nonfiction text, students must acquire oral language skills at a young age. The authors also explain just how important the development of oral language skills is in young children. If students have a limited vocabulary on school entry but develop good decoding skills, they may be able to read easier decodable text or vocabulary-controlled text in the early years but a limited vocabulary will eventually impede reading comprehension as text becomes more sophisticated. In addition to providing young children with a literacy-rich environment, children should be active participants in interactive reading experiences. The interactive reading of picture books is a staple in most preschool literacy programs, and is a great way to promote oral language skills in children. “What we know about brain-based learning tells us this is the right time for reading” (Callaghan & Madeline, 2012, p. 30).

Literacy Instruction in Today’s Kindergarten

As of 2010, Minnesota has adopted the Common Core State Standards for English language arts. As a result, literacy instruction in kindergarten has changed in order to meet the demands. According to an article written by Teach for America (2011), a balanced literacy block is an uninterrupted, two-to-three hour block of time where students are engaged in a variety of literacy tasks including a read aloud, shared reading, guided reading, independent reading, word study, and writing. Similarly, Houck (2013) defines balanced literacy as a framework to teaching literacy that focuses on a balance between teaching literacy skills such as comprehension strategies and phonics, as well as holistic teaching approaches. In the following sections, I will explain the literacy tasks within a balanced literacy framework.

Read Aloud. During the read aloud, the teacher reads a book, poem, or other form of text to the entire class. There are several purposes to reading aloud to students. Reading aloud helps build concepts of print awareness by modeling the ways to read a book (top to bottom, left to right, etc). Read alouds may also help build phonological and phonemic awareness by choosing books with rhyming or predictable patterns. By listening to fluent reading from a read aloud, students are able to hear how to read with expression. Finally, teachers should be asking questions and leading discussions to build comprehension skills (Gunning, 2013, p. 134).

Shared Reading. An article on Reading Rockets entitled “Shared Reading” (2012) defines shared reading as an interactive reading experience that occurs when students share the reading of an enlarged text with guidance from a teacher. During shared

reading, students witness a first-hand look and reading strategies used during everyday reading. Shared reading is typically separated into three parts: before-reading, during-reading, and after-reading. Before reading, the teacher introduces the book and covers basic print concepts. From there students take a picture walk and make predictions about the text. During the reading, the text is typically read multiple times. The first reading is for enjoyment, and the subsequent readings are meant for the students to join in. Teachers should model fluent reading and stop to assess comprehension. After-reading consists of discussions about the book including prediction and final comprehension checks.

Although shared reading and interactive read alouds are similar in many ways, there are key differences. In shared reading, the text is typically enlarged using big books or projectable books. When the text is enlarged, students are able to see reading in action. During this time, the teacher can highlight concepts of print and phonics patterns, and students can “share” the reading with the teacher. For shared reading to be effective, the text must be reread several times and become more student-led and less teacher-led (Annenburg Learner).

Guided Reading. Guided reading is a method of reading instruction in which teachers are able to meet the varying needs of students by placing them in groups specific to their reading level. During a typical guided reading lesson, the teacher selects an appropriately leveled text and introduces it to his or her group. Students quietly read the text at their own speed while the teacher interacts with each student to help solve

problems, sound out words, or administer running records. After the students are done reading the text, the teacher facilitates a discussion to promote comprehension. From there, the teacher provides students with direct instruction on phonics or comprehension strategies found in the chosen text. Students outside of the guided reading group are participating in independent activities, which reinforce previously learned skills (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012, p. 269).

Independent Reading. Independent reading is an important time for students to practice the skills learned during read alouds, shared reading, and guided reading. During independent reading, students are increasing their print concepts, improving their phonics skills by reading and decoding words, and practicing accuracy and fluency by repeatedly reading books. Bernice Cullinan (2000) describes independent reading as, "... reading students choose to do on their own. It reflects the reader's persona choice of material to be read as well as the time and place to read it" (p. 1). Cullinan continues by describing the effects of independent reading including becoming better readers, scoring higher on achievement tests in all subject areas, and having a greater content knowledge than students who do not regularly read independently.

Word Study. During word study, teachers provide direct instruction in the foundation of the English language so students are able to decode words and comprehend stories with ease. The purpose of word study is to improve phonological awareness by allowing students to practice rhymes, onsets/rimes, and syllables. Students practice sound and spelling relationships through phonics activities (Ray & Smith, 2010).

Writing. Writing is an important part of a well-balanced literacy block. According to Teach for America, “Similar to quality reading instruction, excellent writing instruction begins with the teacher modeling a skill or process, moves to the teacher guiding students to use those skills or processes, and culminates in students writing independently” (p. 158). Teachers scaffold their writing instruction in order for students to become more responsible for demonstrating their writing abilities. The purpose of writing instruction is to increase print awareness, strengthen phonics skills, and develop writing skills (Heydon, Moffatt, 2010, p. 178).

Assessing Student Learning

Data collected from formative assessments is used to predict the outcomes of summative assessments. In this section, assessments in kindergarten will be discussed including the use of formative assessments and summative assessments, as well as how the evolution of the kindergarten program has affected the way teachers report student achievement.

Pyle and DeLuca (2013) describe a developmentally appropriate kindergarten program as one which provides academic instruction while fostering a child’s social, emotional, and cognitive development. A program of this type is rooted contains constructivist theories of learning. In constructivist learning, children construct their knowledge through and make connections through activities, which build new learning from prior experience. Developmentally appropriate practices in kindergarten use

child-centered learning experiences such as collaboration and hands-on centers.

Kindergarten teachers have to ensure developmentally appropriate learning experiences while maintaining academic records within an academically motivated environment.

Assessment plays a significant role in the upper years of learning because of the standards-based movement in education. This movement has recently begun to impact assessment in the early years of learning. In kindergarten today, teachers are expected to integrate assessment data throughout their instruction in order to monitor progress and respond accurately to ensure students are meeting the standards. Pyle and DeLuca have noticed an increase in diagnostic and formative assessments in kindergarten. Research supports the use of formative assessments because of the increase in summative assessment results in the upper grades.

Early Reading Assessments. Assessments in kindergarten typically involve several components of beginning reading including letter name identification, letter sound identification, print concepts, phonological awareness, and word reading. These assessments are administered regularly during the year and progress is monitored frequently (Ritchey, 2008, p. 488).

Ritchey concludes that fluency assessments have evidence of reliability and validity, have multiple alternate forms, and can be efficiently administered and scored by teachers. Letter name and sound fluency assesses letter name or sound knowledge by asking children to identify isolated letter sounds. Letters are arranged in a random order and students have one minute to produce as many sounds or name as he or she can.

Nonsense word fluency presents two or three sound words (vowel-consonant or consonant-vowel-consonant) words and students have to read as many words as they can in one minute.

Another assessment used to measure early reading skills in kindergarten is the running record. Running records are used to determine a student's independent and instructional reading level. Running records code a student's reading behaviors, note reading accuracy, and check for comprehension. With this information, teachers can make decisions about the appropriate level for independent reading and instructional reading levels (Fountas & Pinnell, 2013, p. 270).

A Change in Report Cards

The implementation of Common Core and the increasing rigor of kindergarten has resulted in an entirely new report card for kindergarten students. Graue (2011) discusses the changes the kindergarten report card has undergone in the last half-century. A report card in 1960, the progress report was one page long; it focused on the ability to play and get along with others. Graue continues to discuss the evolution of the progress report/report card. In 1998, the progress report had sections on reading, speaking and listening, writing, science, social studies, social skills and work habits, and math, plus a large section for teacher comments. Each area included affective and behavioral information as well as skills. The social skills section was particularly informative, addressing issues of independence, flexibility, work habits, and peer interaction. (p. 14).

Examining Half-Day Kindergarten Programs

Half-day Kindergarten Background. Over the past 50 years, kindergarten education has undergone extreme transformation. In the 1950s virtually all kindergarten programs were half-day. In the 1960s and 1970s, several states began publicly funding kindergarten programs. These half-day programs emphasized play and socialization. In 1965, about half of five-year-olds were enrolled in kindergarten, and twenty years later, enrollment was nearly 100%. The shift of students enrolling in full-day kindergarten began to follow suit.

Advantages of Half-Day Kindergarten Programs. Although research supporting half-day kindergarten is not plentiful, the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) (2004) finds the advantages of half-day kindergarten include more parent involvement and the idea that half-days better meet the needs of students with shorter attention spans (Gallant, 2009, p. 203).

Disadvantages of Half-day Kindergarten Programs. Although half-day kindergarten does bring some advantages to students, there may be far more disadvantages when it comes to learning expectations for students in today's kindergarten programs. Bornfreund (2012) comments on the disadvantages of half-day kindergarten students, "Children enrolled in half-day kindergarten receive less instructional time, likely experience a narrowed curriculum, have less time for experimentation and exploration, and enjoy fewer opportunities for play." Additionally, the shift to Common Core State Standards (2016) typically requires an uninterrupted, 90-minute block of

literacy instruction. With the average half-day program only lasting three hours, students are given 90 minutes to acquire a deep foundation in math, science, social studies, art, as well as time for play and socializing which is also important for kindergarten students. Although Common Core does not direct teachers how to teach the content, half-day students are likely to receive more direct instruction rather than strategies that best meet the development of young children (Bronfreund, 2012).

Examining Full-Day Kindergarten Programs

Factors Influencing the Growth of the Full-Day Kindergarten Program. A full-day versus half-day kindergarten study prepared by Lisa Pitch and Ordene Edwards (2006) of the Clark County School District in Nevada found that several demographic and socio-cultural indicators can help explain the growth of the full-day kindergarten program.

At the time of the study, they found that Approximately 60% of mothers who work outside of their home have children of kindergarten age. As a result, schools need to provide a kindergarten schedule that accommodates these schedules. A second factor influencing the change is that full-day kindergarten programs are a good transition from pre-kindergarten to elementary school. A third factor in the change is focused on preparing 21st century learners. In order for students to be better equipped to succeed in the 21st century, policymakers are pushing for more academic success in the areas of literacy and numeracy.

The NASP (2004) found other factors influencing the evolution of the full-day kindergarten program. First, more and more children participate in preschool programs. As a result, kindergarten is no longer the first school experience. Next, today's children have more opportunities for social, emotional, and physical activities. Many children are used to a full-day type of program which will better prepare them for the rigor of full-day kindergarten. Lastly, similar to Pitch and Edwards' study (2006), NASP also found that in order to ensure academic preparation later in life, there is a demand for early school programs.

High Quality Full-Day Kindergarten Programs. The rigor of the common core standards combined with the lengthened school day poses a challenge for teachers and schools provide high-quality instruction, while still using developmentally appropriate practices for young children. "Small group and individualized teacher-directed activities, as well as child-initiated activities, are essential to successful kindergarten programs" (NASP). The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) suggests ten signs of a good kindergarten classroom:

1. Children are active, playing and working with other children and materials.
2. Children have access to a variety of activities and materials.
3. Children receive individual and small-group work time with teachers, not solely large-group work time with teachers.
4. Children's work decorates the classroom.
5. Children learn numbers and the alphabet during everyday experiences, not

just during instructional times.

6. Children have long periods of time playing and exploring, including daily outside time, and do not fill out worksheets.
7. Children are read to during the day and in small groups, not just during story time.
8. Children receive curriculum individualized to meet their own needs and strengths.
9. Children and parents look forward to school.
10. The focus of the classroom is on the development of the whole child, not just academic readiness.

Weast (2001) suggests that in order for kindergarten programs to be high quality, expectations and rigor must be raised, but not become too overwhelming for students. Furthermore, a full-day program must not be a lengthened half-day program. The goal is to heighten expectations for literacy and math, while still maintaining and caring and supportive environment. In order to achieve this balance, instruction must be meaningful and challenging to students, focused on literacy in reading/language arts and mathematics, based on state standards, and student-centered.

Are Children Ready for the Rigor of Kindergarten Literacy? According to Weast (2001), in order for students to be reading at grade level by third grade, providing them with a high quality, full-day kindergarten program is critical. “Young children from families with sufficient resources already have access to quality preschool programs on a

private basis. Less fortunate children do not, and their lack of opportunity translates into a performance gap that begins before they reach kindergarten” (p. 7). This discrepancy will continue to increase if all students are not given an appropriately rigorous and nurturing environment to learn. The transformation of the full-day kindergarten program brings with it a change in the quality of instruction we are able to provide our students.

Advantages of Full-day Kindergarten. NASP (2004) states that a developmentally appropriate full-day kindergarten may offer a more relaxed atmosphere and greater opportunity for student-centered activities, including creative activities and the development of social skills. Additionally, they found that full-day kindergarten results in higher long-term achievement, especially for disadvantaged and low-income children, and for those receiving Title I services. Full-day students are performing higher in reading in the early grades, and as a result are seeing fewer grade retentions and higher test scores. When students are enrolled in full-day kindergarten, they have more time dedicated to individualized instruction, and spend less time in large group instruction. Moving beyond instructional advantages, full-day students are likely to increase their creativity, problem solving skills, and independence. Furthermore, students have access to nutritional breakfast and lunch (NASP).

Parent and Teacher Perceptions of Full-Day Kindergarten

Parents. Before children enter kindergarten, there are several preschool opportunities including head start, daycare, Montessori, and parenting classes. Parents

must also make decisions regarding half or full-day kindergarten. With all of these factors influencing a parent's decision, what are they considering when making these important decisions? As suggested by Brannon (2005), a parent's decision regarding full or half-day kindergarten was influenced by their child's preschool experiences, parents' perceptions of their own ability to work with their child at home, and the parents' perception of their child's maturity. The decision was not greatly impacted by the parents' schedule and whether or not a parent was home during the day (p. 58). When parents spoke of their child's preschool experiences, they felt the need for full day kindergarten because of the countless options for preschool education. "Now they are starting two-year-old preschool. There's three-year-old preschool, four-year-old preschool. You can do five days, you can do three days. Children need more than half a day of kindergarten because of this" (p. 59). With many students beginning kindergarten with some type of schooling experience, there is no question why parents feel their child is ready for full-day kindergarten.

When speaking to a child's maturity and readiness for a group learning experience, Brannan (2005) found that parents felt strongly that the decision to enroll their child in half or full-day kindergarten had less to do with academic preparation, and more with their opinions on their child's readiness for a full day of kindergarten. "They explained that they see kindergarten as an important year to 'lay the groundwork' for future learning and help children develop a positive attitude about school and learning" (p. 60). She continued by stating that parents seemed more concerned about building their

child's self-esteem about school than they were about the academic abilities in kindergarten.

Parents of half-day kindergarten students typically seemed comfortable with the idea of working with their child at home on academic tasks. Parents working with their child at home preferred the idea of more individual attention, which may be lacking in a classroom setting. Furthermore, parents enjoyed the time available to visit educational locations within the community such as zoos and museums, which tend to be busy on the weekends.

Teachers. In a study conducted by the National Education Association (2008), teachers found several benefits of full-day kindergarten programs. Participating in a full-day kindergarten program eases the transition to first grade by helping students adjust to a six-hour school day. Additionally, teachers found that having more time made the school day less stressful because both teachers and students may be able to become fully invested in their interest and activities, rather than reach a surface level common in half-day kindergarten programs. Finally, switching to full-day kindergarten gave teachers enough time to plan curriculum, incorporate a greater number of thematic units, and offer more in-depth instruction.

Conclusion

This chapter discusses what research has to say to say about kindergarten. The research presented in this chapter helped expand the research question: *What effect does*

the transition from half-day kindergarten to free all-day kindergarten have on student achievement in literacy instruction?

In the first section, the “then and now” of kindergarten was explained.

Kindergarten began as a group learning experience where students learned to build social skills and early literacy concepts. Today, kindergarten is a much more academic-based, results driven program spearheaded by assessment to determine future proficiency in reading and math. Literacy instruction in today’s kindergarten takes a balanced approach, combining independent reading, shared reading, phonics, phonemic awareness, guided reading, and writing. Using a balanced approach to literacy ensures students are receiving appropriate instruction at their level. This instruction is guided by assessment and response to the data, which is also discussed in this section.

The second section examined the advantages and disadvantages of the half-day kindergarten program. While some families see the value in a half-day kindergarten program, a favorable amount of research is in full support of full-day kindergarten, which is discussed next. Several elements of full-day kindergarten support this research, including the availability of preschool programs and the rigorous academic standards that students must master by the end of kindergarten. Full-day kindergarten programs provide more opportunities for students to grow socially, emotionally, and intellectually.

Lastly, the teacher and parent perceptions of the kindergarten program. The main indication for parents selecting an appropriate kindergarten experience for their child depends on the child themselves. Some parents see the value in half-day programs if their

child is not mature enough to tolerate a full day, or if they want to use the extra time to provide their children with out-of-classroom educational experiences. A full day allows teachers to develop high-quality learning experiences rather than direct instruction.

The next chapter will provide an in-depth description of the research methods of this capstone, all of which are extremely important in the development of my research question. To begin, the setting and participants of the research, including school and district demographics and programs available to students. Next, the methodology of the research will be explained by discussing the methods used to analyze student data and to gather attitudes of parents and teachers.

CHAPTER THREE

Research Methods

Introduction

In the previous chapter, the evolution and transformation of the kindergarten program was discussed. For a majority of the past, half-day kindergarten has been the norm for most students. With the prevalence of preschool programs increasing and the demands of students to be reading at grade level by third grade, half-day kindergarten programs began to be transformed into a more rigorous, full-day kindergarten. From there, I discussed the advantages and disadvantages of both full-day and half-day kindergarten, as well as perceptions of teachers and parents.

While there is a tremendous amount of research supporting full-day kindergarten, I am hoping to better understand how this transformation has impacted the students in school district in which I teach. In this district, full-day kindergarten was free for all students beginning in the 2014-2015 school year. The implementation of full-day kindergarten has fueled my curiosity of my research question: *What effect does full day kindergarten have on student achievement in literacy?*

In this chapter, I will discuss the research methods used to help me answer my research question. I will begin by discussing the setting and demographics of the school district in which I teach and how this information pertains to the research question. From there, I will describe the participants of my study. Finally, I will discuss the tools I will use to collect the data and the process I will use to analyze the findings.

Setting

The elementary schools in which the research was conducted the northwestern suburbs of the Minneapolis/St. Paul metropolis. The district includes several early childhood programs, two kindergarten centers, six elementary schools, three middle schools, an elementary alternative learning center, a middle/high school alternative learning center, and two high schools and serves students within seven different cities. The first school where research will be conducted consists of students with a variety of backgrounds. According to this district's website, 43.8% of students are eligible for free or reduced-priced lunch, 9% receive special education services, and 13.5% are learning English as a second language. The diversity of student population includes 58.4% Caucasian, 19.1% Black/African American, 10.9% Hispanic, 11.1% Asian, and 0.5% Native American.

The second elementary school where research was conducted also consists of students with a variety of backgrounds, 42.4% of students are eligible for free or reduced-priced lunch, 13.1% receive special education services, and 3.7% are learning

English as a second language. The diversity of student population includes 63.5% Caucasian, 15.3% Black/African American, 9.7% Hispanic, 9.5% Asian, and 1.9% Native American.

The implementation of full-day kindergarten beginning in the 2014-2015 required the creation of two kindergarten centers within the district. The kindergarten sections at the district's six elementary schools were relocated into two separate kindergarten centers. Each kindergarten center is fully equipped with many of the supports available to students at traditional, multi age elementary schools including reading intervention, special education, English as a Second Language, behavior support, technology integration, speech-language services, and a school social worker.

The school's' "fixed and flexed" mindset allows teachers to thinking flexibly about instruction while having certain components of instruction fixed. For example, the "fixed" component in each classroom is to teach using a balanced literacy framework. Balanced literacy includes guided reading, shared reading, writing, word work/phonics, and independent reading. The "flexed" piece allows teachers to structure this time however they wish. Most commonly, teachers use a centers or Daily 5 (Boushey & Moster, 2006) model of literacy instruction. Another "fixed" component of our instruction are the assessments given to students. Three times per year (fall, winter, and spring), students are assessed on letter name fluency and letter sound fluency. Twice per year (winter and spring), students are assessed on nonsense word fluency using AIMSweb (2016). Students within a certain window receive tier two interventions each

day and are progress monitored each week. Along with the AIMSweb testing, students are assessed on sight words and reading level throughout the year, as well as the Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) test for primary grades. Each of these assessments will be examined later in more detail in this capstone as I investigate the impact of full-day kindergarten.

Human Subjects Committee

Human subjects were included in my research study. As a result, my research study was examined and approved by the Human Subjects Committee at Hamline University.

Methods

In order to fully investigate my research question, I have decided to perform a mixed methods study involving kindergarten, first, and second grade teachers, and real student data from current and prior kindergarten and first grade students. Creswell (2014) describes a mixed methods research study as one that combines qualitative and quantitative data in order to answer a research question. More specifically, I used a convergent parallel mixed methods research study. Because the data I collected did not need to happen in a specific order, I used a convergent parallel mixed methods study. This is defined by Creswell as, "... a form of mixed methods design in which the researcher converges or merges qualitative data and quantitative data in order to provide a

comprehensive analysis of the research problem” (p. 15). The qualitative research consisted of surveying and interviewing teachers focusing on the effect of full-day kindergarten. The quantitative research included collecting and analyzing data from current and past full-day and half-day kindergarten students.

In order to obtain accurate information from teachers, I wrote a survey consisting of open-ended and Likert Scale questions based on the grade level that they teach. First, I surveyed current kindergarten teachers (Appendix A). With this survey, I was able to uncover of the different beliefs about full-day and half-day kindergarten, as well as changes in instructional practices. Next, I surveyed teachers in the first and second grade to gain a better understanding of how their instruction has or will change with the influx of full-day kindergarten students. This survey (Appendix B) will be similar in nature to the kindergarten teacher survey. Some of the other major takeaways from the survey include:

1. Do any gaps exist between students who have completed full-day kindergarten and those who have completed half-day kindergarten?
2. How has literacy instruction changed since teaching full-day kindergarten?

The transition to full-day kindergarten will affect more than just kindergarten teachers.

With the rise in achievement suggested many researchers, teachers in 1st grade, 2nd grade, and beyond need to be prepared for the influx of full-day kindergarten students. By completing a survey (Appendix B) I hope to answer the following questions:

1. Describe the gaps, if any, that exist between half-day student and full-day students?
2. Do you think the gap will eventually close?
3. Do you feel that students who completed full-day kindergarten are more likely to read at grade level by the time they reach third grade?
4. How has/will literacy instruction changed with the transition to full-day kindergarten?

After collecting teacher surveys and analyzing the data, I invited the five participants for an interview to further discuss the survey results.

While live students did not play an active role in this research study, the literacy data from students who completed full-day and half-day kindergarten provided me with a wealth of evidence supporting my research question: *What effect does full-day kindergarten have on student achievement in literacy?* My school district collects several pieces of data for each student. I analyzed, letter name fluency, letter sound fluency, high frequency word retention, and MAP test results, and MCA results.

The different data points were used to look directly at the achievement gap between half-day kindergarten students and full-day kindergarten students. First and second grade literacy assessments will be analyzed to look for changes and possible conditions of these achievement gaps. This information will be used to determine if teacher perceptions of full-day kindergarten coincide with the analysis of student data.

Participants

When selecting the teachers for my capstone project, I was able to gather the opinions, joys, and concerns of teachers who have taught half-day, full-day kindergarten, first grade, and second grade. First, through interviews and surveys, gained insight on their kindergarten teaching experiences as it pertains to student achievement and literacy instruction throughout the evolution of the kindergarten program. After analyzing the data of the surveys, I selected four participants for an interview in order to discuss the results of the survey in more detail. I chose to interview two kindergarten teachers, one first grade teacher, and one second grade teacher.

Teacher #1. Teacher #1 has been teaching kindergarten for 21 years. Of those 21 years, 17 were spent teaching half-day kindergarten, and the last four years have been full-day kindergarten. She holds advanced degrees in Curriculum and Instruction, as well as an Administrative License.

Teacher #2. Teacher #2 has been teaching for seven years. She taught half-day kindergarten for one year, and has spent the last five years teaching full-day kindergarten. For the last two years, she has had a class with both full-day and half-day students. This year (2016-2017), she is a reading intervention teacher. She holds a master's degree in literacy and has a Minnesota K-12 Reading Licensure

Teacher #3. Teacher #3 is currently teaching first grade. She has also taught half-day kindergarten for four years, full-day kindergarten for seven years, and second grade for two years. She holds a masters degree in Curriculum and Instruction.

Teacher #4. Teacher #4 is currently in her ninth year teaching second grade. Her previous experience includes teaching half-day kindergarten for eight years, full-day kindergarten for one year, and fourth grade for one year. She holds a masters degree in Teaching and Learning.

Although students were not participating in this study, I analyzed data from the past several years in order to make comparisons between half-day and full-day kindergarten and its impact on literacy instruction and student achievement. I analyzed district-level data including AIMSweb (2016) (letter name fluency, letter sound fluency), guided reading level, sight words, and MAP test scores in order to determine the program which is proven to be more successful. Furthermore, my goal is to look specifically at the gap between full-day and half-day kindergarten as students have progressed through elementary school.

There was risk for the participants in this survey. Participants were expected to provide their name and contact information, which was used for contact purposes only. When the results of the research are discussed in chapter 4, no names will be used protect the identity of each participant.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the setting of the research was described, including the school location, demographics, and various programs and assessments within the district. Next, the participants were addressed. Multiple tools and participants were included in this

study in order to answer the research question *What effect does the transition from half-day kindergarten to free all-day kindergarten have on student achievement in literacy?* Kindergarten, first, and second grade teachers will be interviewed and the results of various literacy assessments will be shared.

In Chapter 4, I will share the results of the study and determine the effect that full-day kindergarten has on student achievement in literacy instruction.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

Introduction

In chapter three, I discussed the methods used to answer my research question: *What effect does full-day kindergarten have on student achievement in literacy?* First, total of 20 kindergarten, first, and second grade teachers were surveyed in order to learn more about their experiences teaching half-day and/or full-day kindergarten, and to understand how full-day kindergarten impacts student achievement in literacy in the primary grades. After analyzing the results of the surveys, I invited four participants for an interview to discuss their surveys in a more in depth manners.

In this chapter, I will discuss the results of the surveys and the interviews with four teachers. Additionally, I will share the results of several district-wide, kindergarten literacy assessments collected from 2013-2014, which was the final year which half-day kindergarten was the only free option, 2014-2015, the first year of free full-day kindergarten, and 2015-2016, the second year of free full-day kindergarten.

Survey Results

Current Kindergarten Teachers: Likert Scale Questionnaire. The first round of surveys were administered to 10 current kindergarten teachers. The following series of figures help visualize the results of the surveys.

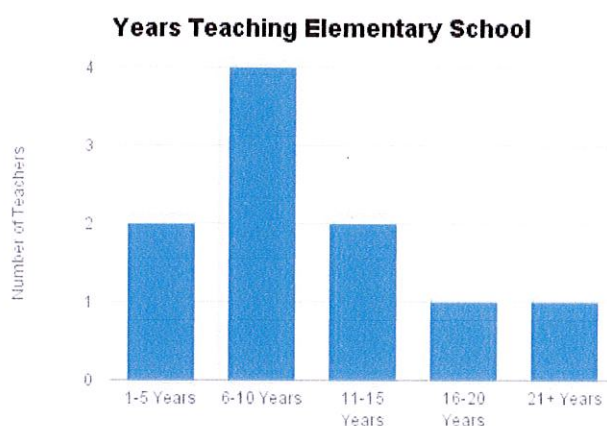


Table 1: Years teaching elementary school. Current kindergarten teachers were asked how many years they have been teaching.

The following questions are analyzed using a Likert Scale. Participants were given a statement and were asked to indicate their score with a one-five scale, with one being *strongly disagree*, two being *disagree*, three being *indifferent*, four being *agree*, and five being *strongly agree*.

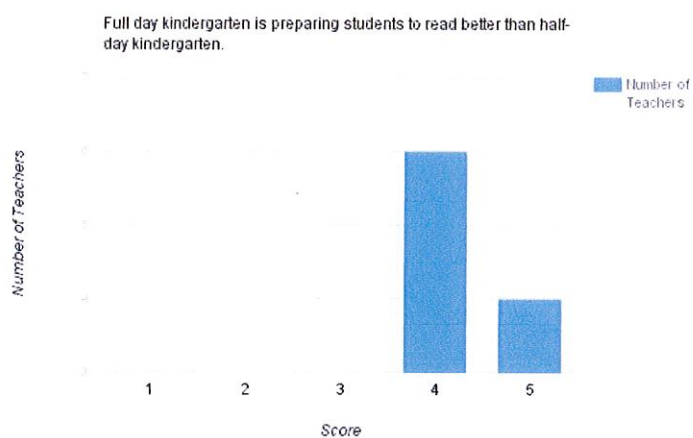


Table 2: Preparing students to read. Six teachers agreed and four teachers strongly agreed that full-day kindergarten is preparing students to read better than half-day kindergarten.

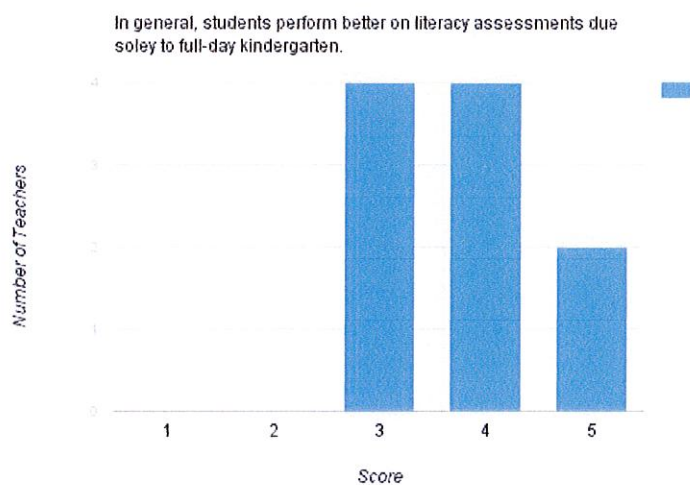


Table 3: Literacy Assessments. Four teachers felt indifferent, four teachers agreed, and two teachers strongly agreed that students perform better on literacy assessments due solely to full-day kindergarten.

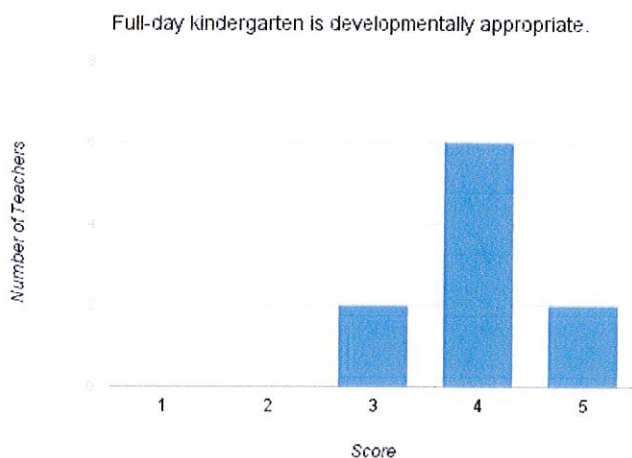


Table 4: Developmental appropriateness. Two teachers felt indifferent, six teachers agreed, and two teachers strongly agreed that full-day kindergarten is developmentally appropriate.

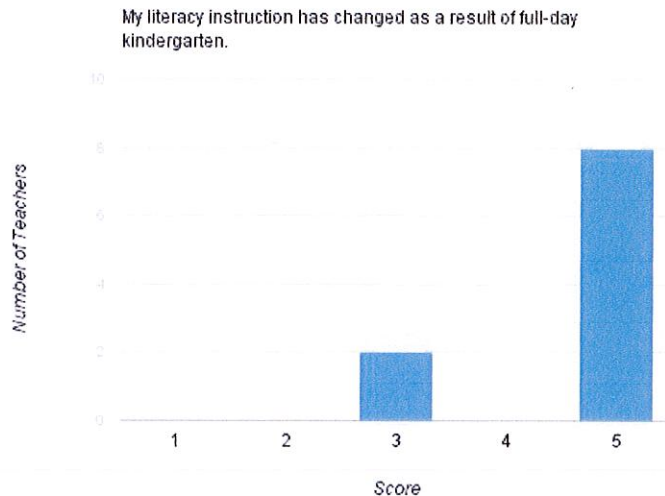


Table 5: Instructional Changes. A majority of teachers report that their literacy instruction has changed as a result of full-day kindergarten.

Current Kindergarten Teachers: Open Responses. Along with the previous questions, teachers were also asked a series of open ended questions. In this section, a brief overview of the open ended responses will be discussed, with a more detailed transcription of Teacher #1 and Teacher #2's elaboration of the open responses.

First, teachers were asked: *How has literacy instruction changed over time?*

Responses yielded that the expectation of kindergarten literacy instruction has increased significantly. Several teachers reported that literacy instruction has become more rigorous. For example, Teacher #1 stated, "When I first started teaching kindergarten, we taught a letter a week. Eventually it progressed to a letter a day using the Jolly Phonics (1987) program. Very few sight words were required as little as 4 years ago. Now over 92 sight words are expected." Other teachers discussed how full-day kindergarten offers more time to meet the individual needs of students.

Literacy practices have become more differentiated and include guided reading where students are provided time with the teacher working on skills directed to their specific needs. This did not happen as regularly or with as much fidelity in half-day programs that I worked within.

Secondly, kindergarten teachers were asked to list some of the major advantages of full-day kindergarten. All 10 teachers mentioned that full-day kindergarten offers more time for literacy instruction. Additionally, students in full-day kindergarten have

more, "...opportunity for effective teachers to provide individualized instruction"

(Interview, Teacher #1). Other advantages of full-day kindergarten will be described later in this chapter when interview responses are transcribed.

The third open response question asked, *Are there any disadvantages of full-day kindergarten? If so, please explain.* Almost unanimously, teachers agreed that while most students are ready for full-day kindergarten, there continue to be students who are not ready for the rigor of kindergarten. Other teachers reported a lack of support staff, both behavioral and academic, for students who show difficulty in full-day kindergarten.

The final open response question was, *What are some key differences between half-day kindergarten and full-day kindergarten in regards to student achievement in literacy?* Each teacher agreed that students in full-day kindergarten perform better on literacy-related assessments than half-day kindergarten students. Many teachers attributed this to the extra time spent practicing different literacy skills during many parts of the day. Teacher #2 teacher explains that, "...even in half-day kindergarten I had some high-achieving readers. However, on the whole, the average guided reading level of students is much higher with more students obtaining grade-level in a full-day setting." Another teacher states, "After teaching half-day kindergarten for three years, I was shocked at what my students could do at the end of my first year of full-day kindergarten" (Interview, Teacher #1).

First and Second Grade Teachers: Likert Questionnaire. Similar to current kindergarten teachers, first and second grade teachers were given a similar set of questions, both Likert and open response.

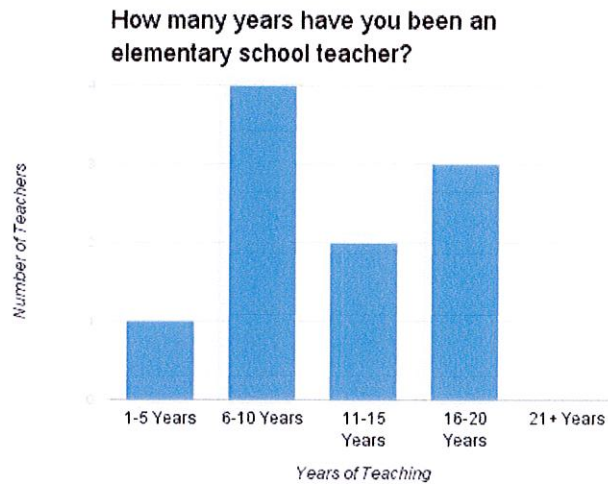


Table 6: Years Teaching Elementary School. First and second grade teachers were asked how many years they have been teaching.

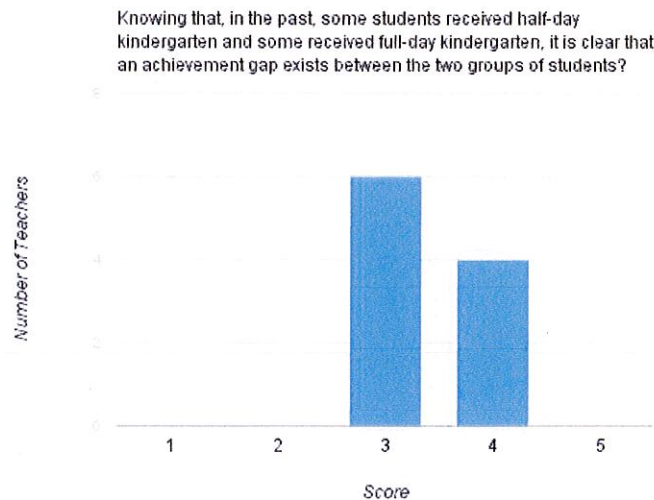


Table 7: Achievement Gap. Six teachers felt indifferent about an achievement gap between the two groups, while four agreed there was a gap between the two groups.

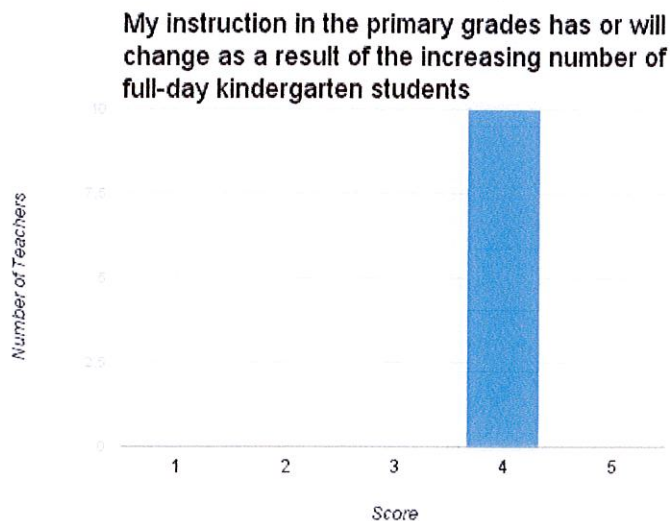


Table 8: Instructional Changes. All ten teachers agreed that their instruction in the primary grades will change as a result of the increasing number of full-day kindergarten students.

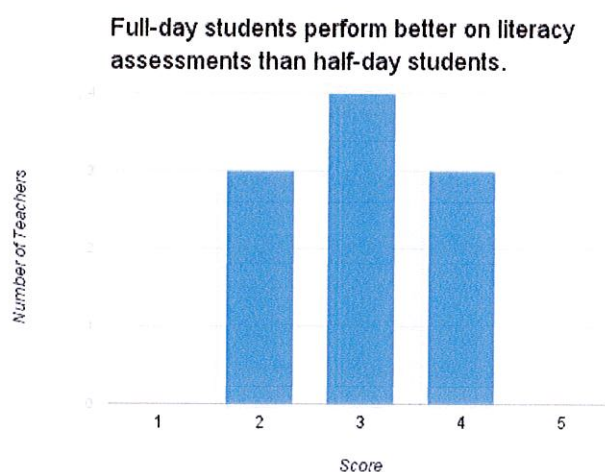


Table 9: Literacy Assessment. A majority of teachers either disagreed or felt indifferent about full-day students' achievement on literacy assessments compared to half-day students.

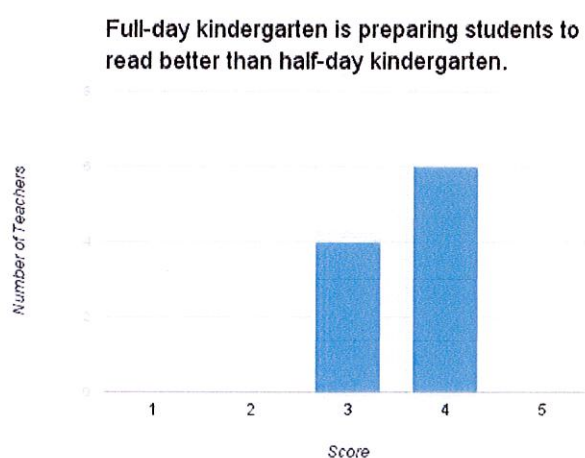


Figure 10: Preparing Students to Read. A majority (six) teachers agree that full-day kindergarten is better at preparing students to read, while four teachers feel indifferent.

First and Second Grade Teachers: Open Responses. The ten first and second grade teachers also answered open response questions in the areas of student achievement in literacy.

The first question asks, *How has my instruction changed because of the increasing number of full-day kindergarten students?* Overall, teachers felt that students who completed full-day kindergarten have a greater learning stamina. Teacher #3 states, “Students have increased stamina which allows me more time for small groups and individualized instruction.” The same teacher mentioned that more time in kindergarten leads to greater background knowledge in various areas. “With full-day kindergarten students comes better background knowledge, meaning I can move them along more quickly.”

Secondly, teachers were asked, *Please describe gaps, if any, that exist between students who have completed full-day kindergarten compared to half-day kindergarten.* Once again, many teachers commented on the increased stamina, specifically in first grade. “I think the biggest gap is academic stamina, being able to focus for a whole day of learning. This gap often is gone by the first part of November” (Interview, Teacher #3) A former kindergarten teacher and current second grade teacher states, “It has been quite a while since I have taught kindergarten. I never really noticed significant gaps in half-day and full-day kids. I think it really just depends on the child and their readiness to learn” (Interview, Teacher #4).

Interview Results

While there were no specific interview questions for each of the four teachers, I was able to gain a significant amount of knowledge which was not shared in the survey. I selected two kindergarten teachers, a first grade teacher, and a second grade teacher to discuss student achievement in more detail.

Teacher #1. Teacher #1 has the most experience teaching kindergarten. She has spent 17 years teaching half-day kindergarten, and is in her third year teaching full-day kindergarten. When discussing the survey results with this teacher, I was particularly interested in her comments about how kindergarten instruction has changed since the beginning of her career. In her survey, she stated, “When I first started teaching kindergarten, we learned a letter per week. Eventually it turned into a letter per day. Very few sight words were required as a little as four years ago, and now 92 sight words are required.” While she felt that this was a positive change specifically in literacy, she feels that we have lost the benefits of play in the classroom. “I think at this point, we are expecting too much from the students. We have lost the benefits of play in the classroom. We are also seeing more behavior issues due, in part, to the pressure the students and teachers are feeling.” I ended the interview by asking her the question I am seeking to answer, *What effect does full-day kindergarten have on student achievement in literacy?* She answered by saying, “Because of the longer period of time, I am able to spend more time teaching literacy. Because of this, I have more time for guided reading groups. I do

feel that full-day students have higher achievement in literacy, but I feel it evens out by second or third grade.”

Teacher #2. Teacher #2 has been teaching for seven years. She has taught half-day kindergarten for one year, full-day kindergarten for five years, and is a reading intervention teacher this year (2016-2017). I was particularly interested in this teacher because she discussed assessment heavily in her survey responses. When asked, *How has kindergarten literacy changed over time?* She mentioned that when she started teaching, letter names and sounds were assessed, but not fluency. Over the last few years, letter name and sound fluency has been a major assessment and intervention criteria. Additionally, she mentions that guided reading levels were not frequently assessed, but this changed once full-day kindergarten began. A full-day of kindergarten meant more time for small group reading instruction, and one of the only ways to effectively teach small group reading is to frequently assess guided reading levels. When reflecting on my research question, Teacher #2 says that it is hard to quantify literacy achievement between half-day and full-day kindergarten because assessment was not as prevalent in half-day kindergarten. However, she does feel that the small group instruction expectations of full-day kindergarten teachers gives students a much better chance of reaching the end-of-year reading goals including guided reading level, letter name fluency, letter sound fluency, nonsense word fluency, and MAP test.

Teacher #3. Teacher #3 has been teaching first grade for four years. Prior to teaching first grade, she taught half-day kindergarten for four years, and full-day

kindergarten for seven years. This teacher feels that full-day kindergarten has a positive effect on student achievement in literacy, specifically academic stamina and foundational skills. In the area of academic stamina, this teacher sees a significant difference at the beginning of the year. Because students are used to a full day of learning, they adjust to the routines more quickly than previous years. Along with stamina, this teacher has noticed a difference in the students' foundational skills such as vowel sounds, letter name and sound fluency, nonsense word fluency, phonemic awareness, and print awareness. "I feel like I have just needed to review many of these foundational skills rather than entirely reteach them. I am sure this is due to the increased time engaged in literacy activities and the increased assessment expectations."

Teacher #4. Teacher #4 has been teaching second grade for nine years, and spent the previous nine years teaching kindergarten. Of those nine years, eight were spent teaching half-day kindergarten, and one year was spent teaching full-day kindergarten. When reflecting on her experiences teaching kindergarten, she said that students in full-day kindergarten now have much higher expectations than when she taught. In regards to student achievement in literacy, this teacher feels that full-day kindergarten is not as much of a factor as is using best practices and having a teacher who sets high expectations for students. "Students leave Kindergarten more prepared for 1st grade, but I believe that has more to do with the rigorous expectations and teaching practices than it does with the amount of hours spent in school." She also says that by second grade, the gaps have likely evened out.

Kindergarten Assessment Data

While surveying teachers was a significant portion of this research project, my goal is to see if teachers' ideas correlated with assessment data collected over the last several years. Below are the results of several literacy assessments taken from the 2013-2014,, 2014-2015 (first year of free, full-day kindergarten), and 2016-2017 academic years.

	Letter Name Fluency: Average /Median	Letter Sound Fluency: Average/ Median	Dolch Words: Average/ Median	Nonsense Word Fluency: Average/ Median	MAP Reading Assessment: Average/ Median RIT Score	MAP Reading: Average/ Median Percentile
2013-2014 Half Day Students	39.1/42 Names Per Minute	35.0/37 Sounds Per Minute	55.5/55 Words	9.2/9 Words Per Minute	147.3/155	46.3/44
2013-2014 Full Day Students	50.7/55 Names Per Minute	47.2/51 Sounds Per Minute	77.4/85.5 Words	15.8/14.5 Words Per Minute	148.2/166	67.2/76
2013-2014 All Students	45.1/49 Names Per Minute	41.4/43 Sounds Per Minute	66.8/77 Words	12.8/12 Words Per Minute	147.8/160	57.2/62.5

Figure 11: 2013-2014 Kindergarten Assessment Data. This table breaks down the results of kindergarten literacy assessments in the final year of half-day kindergarten. This table is broken down into half-day students, full-day students, and combined (AIMSweb).

	Letter Name Fluency: Average/Median	Letter Sound Fluency: Average/Median	Dolch Words: Average/Median	Nonsense Word Fluency: Average/Median	MAP Reading Assessment: Average/Median RIT Score	MAP Reading: Average/Median Percentile
2014-2015	60.0/58 Names Per Minute	56.9/54 Names Per Minute	74.9/84 Words	18.4/15 Words Per Minute	165.7/165	66.3/73

Figure 12: 2014-2015 Kindergarten Assessment Data. This table breaks down the results of kindergarten literacy assessments in the first year of full-day kindergarten (AIMSweb).

	Letter Name Fluency: Average/Median	Letter Sound Fluency: Average/Median	Dolch Words: Average/Median	Nonsense Word Fluency: Average/Median	MAP Reading Assessment: Average/Median RIT Score	MAP Reading: Average/Median Percentile
2015-2016	64.0/60 Names Per Minute	59/56 Names Per Minute	78/8/84 Words	17.1/16 Words Per Minute	163.8/162	64.4/71

Figure 13: 2015-2016 End of Year Assessment Data. This table breaks down the results of kindergarten literacy assessments in the first year of full-day kindergarten (AIMSweb).

The results of these assessments show the positive impact that full-day kindergarten has on student achievement in literacy. When comparing students in half-day kindergarten to those in full-day kindergarten, full-day kindergarten students out-perform their half-day counterparts in all areas.

First Grade Assessment Data

In order to further examine the achievement trends of the full-day kindergarten students, I have compiled assessment data of first grade students during the 2014-2014 academic year, and the 2015-2016 academic year.

	Fall Words Per Minute: Average	Winter Words Per Minute: Average	Spring Words Per Minute: Average
2014-2015	28	59	82
2015-2016	38	70	94

Table 14: First Grade Curriculum Based Measure Data. This table depicts first grade assessment data from 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 based solely on a one minute timed fluency assessment with a first grade level passage (AIMSweb).

	Fall	Winter	Spring
2014-2015	12.3 Words Per Minute	22.6 Words Per Minute	24 Words Per Minute
2015-2016	17.6 Words Per Minute	27.6 Words Per Minute	29 Words Per Minute

Table 15: First Grade Nonsense Word Fluency: The table above shows the average nonsense words per minute between the first grade students who did not have full-day kindergarten (2014-2015) and the first grade students who did complete full-day kindergarten (2015-2016) (AIMSweb).

Second Grade Assessment Data

The table below shows the impact that full-day kindergarten has in second grade. Both 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 students were not part of the free full-day kindergarten transition. 2016-2017 second grade students are the first to complete full-day kindergarten.

	<i>Fall Words Per Minute: Average</i>
<i>2014-2015</i>	<i>70</i>
<i>2015-2016</i>	<i>74</i>
<i>2016-2017</i>	<i>79</i>

Table 16: Second Grade Curriculum Based Measure - Fall. The 2016-2017 second grade students are the first class with full-day kindergarten. 2015-2016 scores are from the last

class offering half-day kindergarten. Only Fall scores are reported because the data was taken so recently (AIMSweb).

The purpose of the tables in this chapter are to display the results of various kindergarten, first, and second grade literacy assessments. When answering the research question, *What effect does full-day kindergarten have on student achievement in literacy?*, the tables represent a significant portion of the argument in favor of full-day kindergarten.

Conclusion

In this chapter, results of the research were shared to help answer my research question: *What effect does full-day kindergarten have on student achievement in literacy?* To begin, a total of 20 kindergarten, first, and second grade teachers were surveyed. The purpose of the survey was to capture the opinions of teachers who are in the middle of a significant shift: free full-day kindergarten for every student. When this time came, expectations of students and teachers changed dramatically. The survey helped me understand how literacy instruction has changed, and what we can expect from students now that nearly every student is in a full-day kindergarten program.

The results from the surveys combined with the interviews and kindergarten, first grade, and second grade assessment data conclude that full-day kindergarten has a positive impact on student achievement in literacy. It is clear full-day kindergarten has had a positive impact on achievement in literacy as indicated by the assessments results

from first grade and second grade literacy assessments. Kindergarten teachers attribute this growth to the increased time teaching literacy, specifically small group and guided reading. Not only is there a positive impact in kindergarten classrooms, but the research conducted throughout this conclude that impact has reached far beyond the kindergarten classroom.

In the final chapter, I will reflect on my research question: *What effect does full-day kindergarten have on student achievement in literacy?* My reflection will include revisiting the literature review, discussing limitations in the research, and implication for future research.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

Introduction

My teaching career began in a kindergarten during the 2014-2015 academic year, a monumental year for education in Minnesota. During that year, all students were able to attend a full-day kindergarten program at no cost. While I was becoming acquainted my colleagues, I had many interesting conversations about what opportunities this will bring for our students. In the past, there was very little time for teachers to individualize instruction by teaching in small groups, and the rigor of the kindergarten curriculum was nowhere near what it is today. Many teachers were new to full-day kindergarten at the start of that year. As a result, a significant amount of the professional development was geared toward literacy instruction in full-day kindergarten, balanced literacy, and small group instruction.

As I was in the process of planning this capstone, I knew that something in the realm of kindergarten literacy was of major interest to me. It was not until the end of my first year of teaching when this idea struck me. This idea came to me when we, for the first time, saw the impact that full-day kindergarten had on our students' achievement in all areas.

Revisiting the Literature

The goal of my capstone and action research was to discover the effect that full-day kindergarten has on student achievement in literacy in my school district. Until the 2014-2015 school year, families wishing to enroll in full-day kindergarten had to pay tuition. The result was that about 50% of kindergarten students prior to the 2014-2015 school year were in half-day programs, while the other 50% were in full-day programs.

Research in support of high-quality full-day kindergarten suggests that children are engaged in daily small group reading instruction (NASP, 2004). Nearly every kindergarten teacher who took the survey indicated that full-day kindergarten has given them the opportunity to do just this. Additionally, full-day kindergarten offers teachers more time to implement a balanced literacy framework. A balanced literacy framework is a two-three hour block of time dedicated solely to reading instruction. Houck (2013) defines balanced literacy as a framework of teaching literacy that Components of balanced literacy include read aloud, shared reading, guided reading, writing, phonics, and phonemic awareness. Having a classroom where balanced literacy occurred daily may be nearly impossible in half-day kindergarten, and teachers have responded positively to the increased amount available for literacy instruction, specifically guided reading.

Limitations

Although this research concludes that full-day kindergarten has a positive effect on student achievement in literacy, there were some limitations in this study. Two of the limitations of the study were the lack of research supporting half-day kindergarten and the fact that kindergarten has just recently been offered to students at no cost.

During the research process, a significant portion of the research supported full-day kindergarten in comparison to half-day kindergarten. I had difficulty finding research that supported half-day kindergarten which included specific information about achievement in literacy. The minimal amount of research found supporting half-day kindergarten focused on social development rather than literacy achievement.

The second limitation of this student was the length of time the district has offered free full-day kindergarten. At the time of the research, the only two grade levels impacted by this transition were kindergarten and first grade. Although the kindergarten and first grade teachers provided valuable insight, the effect of full-day kindergarten has only had an immediate impact on these two grade levels.

Another limitation found during this research project is the way that assessment in the primary grades has changed over the course of the years, even as recently as the last five years. Kindergarten teachers surveyed in this study indicated that they had difficulties quantifying the achievement gap between half-day kindergarten and full-day kindergarten because assessment was not prevalent in half-day kindergarten.

A final limitation of the research was my own bias toward full-day. My experiences teaching kindergarten and being an advocate for full-day kindergarten likely had an impact on the research and its findings.

Implication of Current Research and Ideas for Future Research

When we look at the data, full-day kindergarten has a positive impact on student achievement in literacy. The research presented in this capstone could be used by various stakeholders to evaluate the effectiveness of the current practices in full-day and half-day kindergarten. Since full-day kindergarten began just two years ago, it is important to consider how early this research is taking place. The first group of full-day kindergarten students are currently beginning their second grade year. With this in mind, an implication for future research would be to keep following the growth of this class compared to previous classes. Will students continue to outperform previous classes on literacy assessments like they did in kindergarten and first grade, or will the gap close as they make their way through elementary school?

I am also interested in researching literacy instruction in the primary grades. Although this capstone has touched on this subject, I feel there has been significant changes in the way we are teaching children to read. With the implementation of the Common Core State Standards, and other factors such as technology integration and STEAM, there are bound to be changes in our instruction in order to meet the needs of the 21st century.

Using and Communicating the Results

This project has truly been a team effort among many members of my school and district. I have worked closely with members of the school and district's assessment committee in order to obtain current and past assessment results. I am eager to share the results of my research with members of the curriculum, instruction, and assessment departments. These departments have worked tirelessly over the last several years in order to implement a successful full-day kindergarten program. The results of this capstone will be used to reiterate the the impact that full-day kindergarten has on student achievement in literacy which could be useful to teachers, administrators, and families of current and future kindergarten students.

Putting It All Together

I am confident that this experiences has helped me embody the four themes of Hamline University's Conceptual Framework. Multiple opportunities to construct my knowledge and challenge my perspective as an educator were present in this project. Building a community of teachers and learners has occurred through the countless conversations I have had with many outstanding educators within my school and district. By determining the best practices in kindergarten education, I am more capable of promoting equity within my school, district, and society in order for all students to be

successful. Finally, this processes has taught me the importance of practicing thoughtful inquiry and reflection while piecing everything together.

I love to teach and I love to learn. As an educator, my goal is to teach children to be successful in the 21st century by implementing best practices in all areas of my teaching. Throughout this process, I have learned just how much instruction has changed at the primary level. However, I can say with certainty that the changes being made are having a positive impact on the literacy achievement of our students. The capstone process has indeed been one of the most challenging projects I have ever completed. However, without it, I would not be where I am today.

APPENDIX A

Kindergarten Teacher Survey

KINDERGARTEN TEACHER BELIEFS SURVEY

Part I: Please check one box for each statement unless noted differently.

Please tell me about yourself.

Current Position: _____

Please tell me about your teaching career.

1) How many years have you been an elementary school teacher?

_____ 1 - 5 yrs.

_____ 6 -10 yrs.

_____ 11 - 15 yrs.

_____ 16 - 20 yrs.

_____ 21 + yrs.

2) I have taught the following:

_____ Half-day kindergarten only. If so, how many years _____

_____ Full-day kindergarten only. If so, how many years _____

_____ Half-day and full-day.

How many years of half-day? _____

How many years of full-day? _____

_____ I have experience teaching full-day and half-day students in the same classroom.

3) Roughly how many minutes of your school day is spent on the following?

_____ Entire literacy block

_____ Read aloud

_____ Shared reading

_____ Guided reading

_____ Writing

_____ Phonics/Word Word

_____ whole group instruction

_____ free play

_____ other _____

Part II: Recognizing that some things in education programs are necessary in your district, what are *your own personal beliefs* about kindergarten programs? Please circle opinion that most nearly signifies *your beliefs* about each item's importance for kindergarten programs.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Indifferent	Agree	Strongly Agree	N/ A
1. Parents should still have the choice to enroll their student in full-day kindergarten.						
2. Full-day kindergarten is developmentally appropriate.						
3. My instruction has changed because of full-day kindergarten.						
5. Students perform better on literacy assessments due solely to full-day kindergarten						
6. Full day kindergarten is better preparing students to read.						
7. Frequent assessment and progress monitoring is essential to providing effective instruction.						

Part III: Please answer as best as you can.

How has kindergarten literacy instruction changed?

What are a few of the major advantages of full-day kindergarten?

Are there any disadvantages to full-day kindergarten?

This question is only for teachers who have taught full-day and half-day kindergarten

What are some key differences in full-day and half-day kindergarten in regards to student achievement?

Thank you for completing this survey!

APPENDIX B

First and Second Grade Teacher Survey

TEACHER BELIEFS SURVEY

Part I: Please check all that apply**Please tell me about your teaching career.**

2. How many years (including this year) have you been an elementary school teacher?

_____ 1 - 5 yrs.

_____ 6 -10 yrs.

_____ 11 - 15 yrs.

_____ 16 - 20 yrs.

_____ 21 + yrs.

3. I have taught the following:

_____ I have experience teaching full-day and half-day students in the same classroom.

_____ Half-day kindergarten only. If so, how many years _____

_____ Full-day kindergarten only. If so, how many years _____

_____ Half-day and full-day.

How many years of half-day? _____

How many years of full-day? _____

_____ 1st Grade_____ 2nd Grade_____ 3rd Grade_____ 4th Grade_____ 5th Grade

3. Roughly how many minutes of your school day is spent on the following?

_____ Entire literacy block

_____ Read aloud

_____ Shared reading

_____ Guided reading

_____ Writing

_____ Phonics/Word Word

_____ whole group instruction

_____ free play

_____ other _____

Part II: Recognizing that some things in education programs are necessary in your district, what are *your own personal beliefs* about kindergarten programs?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Indifferent	Agree	Strongl y Agree	N/ A
1. Parents should still have the choice to enroll their student in full-day kindergarten.						
2. Full-day kindergarten is developmentally appropriate.						
3. My instruction in the primary or intermediate grades has changed because of the increase in full-day kindergarten students.						
5. Full-day students perform better on literacy assessments than half-day students.						
6. A gap exists between half-day kindergarten students and full-day kindergarten students.						
7. Full-day kindergarten better prepares students for success in the upper elementary grades.						

Part III: Please answer as best as you can.

How has/will the increase in full-day kindergarten students impacted your literacy instruction?

Please describe the differences you notice in full-day kindergarten students and half-day kindergarten students.

Describe the gaps (if any) that exist between full-day and half-day kindergarten students.

Thank you for completing this survey!

APPENDIX C
Teacher/Administrator Letter of Informed Consent

May 2016

Dear Teacher or Administrator,

I am a graduate student working on an advanced degree in literacy education at Hamline University, St. Paul, Minnesota. As part of my graduate work, I plan to conduct research with K-6 in our district from July – October 2016. The purpose of this letter is to request your participation. This research is public scholarship the abstract and final product will be cataloged in Hamline's **Bush Library Digital Commons**, a searchable electronic repository and that it may be published or used in other ways.

The topic of my master's capstone (thesis) is the effect that full-day kindergarten has on student achievement in literacy. First, I plan to survey many teachers with questions regarding their beliefs and practices in the classroom, and how the increasing numbers of full-day kindergarten students will impact achievement and instruction. After completing the survey and analyzing results, I will select a handful of teachers to interview based on their responses to the questions. The interviews will last about 20 minutes. The interview questions will be an expansion of your answers on the survey. Information from the interview will be recorded in an electronic, password protected form. After completing the capstone, I will summarize the findings in a report to be distributed to interview participants and to our school administrators.

There is little to no risk if you choose to be interviewed. All results will be confidential and anonymous. Pseudonyms for the district, schools, and participants will be used. The interviews will be conducted at a place and time that are convenient for you. Notes will be taken during the interview on a password protected electronic form.

Participation in the interview is voluntary, and, at any time, you may decline to be interviewed or to have your interview content deleted from the capstone without negative consequences.

I have received approval from the School of Education at Hamline University and from our district office to conduct this study. The capstone will be cataloged cataloged in Hamline's **Bush Library Digital Commons**, a searchable electronic repository. My results might be included in an article in a professional journal or a session at a professional conference. In all cases, your identity and participation in this study will be confidential.

If you agree to participate, keep this page. Fill out the duplicate agreement to participate on page two and return it to me by mail or copy the form in an email to me no later than _____. If you have any questions, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Philip Munkvold

Pike Lake Kindergarten Center

Informed Consent to Participate in Qualitative Interview

Keep this full page for your records.

I have received the letter about your research study for which you will be interviewing science teachers and analyzing documents related to our district science assessment system. I understand that being interviewed poses little to no risk for me, that my identity will be protected, and that I may withdraw from the interview portion of the project at any time without negative consequences.

Signature

Date

[Informed Consent to Participate in Qualitative Interview

Return this portion to Phil Munkvold

I have received the letter about your research study for which you will be interviewing science teachers and analyzing documents related to our district science assessment system. I understand that being interviewed poses little to no risk for me, that my identity will be protected, and that I may withdraw from the interview portion of the project at any time without negative consequences.

Signature

Date

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- AIMSweb. (n.d.). Retrieved November 07, 2016, from
<https://aimswb.pearson.com/Report.cfm?inc=rReport32A.cfm&Grade=2x>
- Annenberg Learner - Literacy Teaching Practices. (n.d.). Retrieved May 07, 2016, from
<http://www.learner.org/>
- Bornfreund, L. A. (2012). The Half-Day Kindergarten/Common-Core Mismatch.
Education Week, 32(13), 33-35
- Boushey, G., & Moser, J. (2006). *The daily 5*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.
- Callaghan, G., & Madelaine, A. (2012). Levelling the playing field for kindergarten entry: Research implications for preschool early literacy instruction. *Australasian Journal Of Early Childhood*, 37(1), 13-23.
- Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Curwood, J. S. (2007). What Happened to Kindergarten?. *Instructor*, 117(1), 28-32.
- Fountas, I. i., & Pinnell, G. p. (2012). Guided Reading: The Romance and the Reality.
Reading Teacher, 66(4), 268-284.
- Gallant, P. A. (2009). Kindergarten Teachers Speak Out: "Too Much, Too Soon, Too Fast!". *Reading Horizons*, 49(3), 201-220.
- Graue, E. (2011). Are We Paving Paradise?. *Educational Leadership*, 68(7), 12-17.

- Gunning, T. G. (2013). *Creating literacy instruction for all students*. Boston: Pearson.
- Heydon, R., Moffatt, L., & Iannacci, I. (2015). 'Every day he has a dream to tell': classroom literacy curriculum in a full-day kindergarten. *Journal Of Curriculum Studies*, 47(2), 171-202.
- Lee, V. E., Burkam, D. T., Ready, D. D., Honigman, J., & Meisels, S. J. (2006). Full-day versus half-day kindergarten: In which program do children learn more? *American Journal of Education*, 112, 163-208.
- Pyle, A. a., & DeLuca, C. (2013). Assessment in the Kindergarten Classroom: An Empirical Study of Teachers' Assessment Approaches. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 41(5), 373-380.
- Houck, H. D. *A Summary of Balanced Literacy*. Quality Teaching Network: Reading (2008). (updated 2013).
- Ray, K., & Smith, M. C. (2010). The Kindergarten Child: What Teachers and Administrators Need to Know to Promote Academic Success in all Children.
- Ritchey, K. D. (2008). Assessing Letter Sound Knowledge: A Comparison of Letter Sound Fluency and Nonsense Word Fluency. *Exceptional Children*, 74(4), 487-506.
- Shared Reading. (n.d.). Retrieved May 07, 2016, from http://www.readingrockets.org/strategies/shared_reading